Is a Decentralized, Non-Standardized Approach to Data Sharing in Archaeology Good Enough?

Shannon P. McPherron

Dept. of Human Evolution, Max Planck Inst. for Evolutionary Anthropology,
Deutscher Platz 6, 04103 Leipzig, Germany

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For decades there have been numerous efforts to design and build data standards and databases for the central storage, management and analysis of archaeological data. The success of these systems, as measured by participation and by research output, is varied. Mainly it seems that participation in these efforts is correlated with statutory requirements, and that in the absence of such enforcement mechanisms archaeologists continue to go their own way in terms of what they record and how (if) they share it. The good news is that in the meantime, significant technological advances have brought the ability of individual researchers to very effectively publish their data, and there appears to be an upcoming generation of archaeologists that are exploiting these new tools to good advantage. Here, I consider some of the benefits and drawbacks to this decentralized and non-standardized approach to data sharing, and I provide some practical examples. I conclude that in fact this approach may be better suited to much of research in archaeology.

ORCID®
Shannon P. McPherron https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2063-468X

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